

Conference Abstract

If Wikipedia is the Gateway to Biodiversity Knowledge, How do we Open the Gate?

Nicole Kearney [‡]

[‡] Biodiversity Heritage Library Australia, Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding author: Nicole Kearney (nkearney@museum.vic.gov.au)

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Abstract

Wikipedia may have become the world's principal source of information, but it is not a reliable source. Wikipedia itself is quite explicit on this point. The Wikipedia article entitled *Wikipedia is not a reliable source* clearly states that, because Wikipedia can be edited by anyone, at any time, "any information it contains at any particular time could be vandalism, a work in progress, or just plain wrong" (Wikipedia 2019a).

Despite this, Wikipedia continues to gain status as a trusted authority on, well, everything. It does not, however, have authority on its own; it has authority because it links to authoritative sources. Wikipedia's *Verifiability* policy (Wikipedia 2019b) states that:

1. all material in its articles should be "attributable to reliable and published sources"; and
2. all quotations and any material likely to be challenged "must be supported by inline citations".

This does not mean that Wikipedia is always right; rather (according to the Wikipedia article *Wikipedia is wrong*) that "the threshold for inclusion in Wikipedia is verifiability, not truth" (Wikipedia 2019c).

What this does mean is that Wikipedia is riddled with citations to the primary literature. Thus, articles about the world's species reference taxonomic descriptions (and subsequent revisions), as well as scientific papers about physiology, evolution, behaviour, ecology,

conservation, etc. In order “to facilitate the verification of sourced statements”, Wikipedia’s Scientific Citation Guidelines encourage editors to, wherever possible, include links to scientific articles in the form of DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers) (Wikipedia 2019d).

A DOI is a unique, permanent and persistent identifier that is assigned to a fixed piece of online content (usually) at the time of its publication. The DOI system creates a reciprocal linked network of scholarly publications that allows researchers to click from article to article in a never-ending trail of knowledge (whether those articles are in scientific journals or on Wikipedia). This linked network functions seamlessly for modern scientific publications, because DOIs have been almost universally adopted by scientific publishers. But issues arise when it comes to linking to historic publications.

Historic literature is the foundation upon which our understanding of biodiversity is based. If Wikipedia is the world’s gateway to that literature, Wikipedia editors must be able to find it and link to it. This presentation will discuss the complexities involved in linking from Wikipedia to the legacy scientific literature, particularly the availability of that literature online, the difference between easy and open access, and what the bioinformatics community can do to help.

Keywords

Wikipedia, Digital Object Identifiers, DOIs, persistent identifiers, citations, publications, online publishing, scientific publications, scholarly publishing, open access, paywalls, historic literature, legacy literature, copyright, biodiversity, bioinformatics, authority control, sources, references, verifiability

Presenting author

Nicole Kearney

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